

Tamoxifen

Nolvadex®

Cancer-directed **hormonal** therapy in tablets

Understanding your treatment

What is a hormonal therapy?

Hormonal therapy slows the growth of cancers that use natural hormones (for example: estrogen, progesterone and testosterone) to grow. Hormonal therapy can either stop the body from producing the hormones that cause cancer growth or it may prevent the use of the hormones by the cancer cells.

Hormonal therapy can be used alone or in combination with other treatments such as a targeted therapy.

How can hormonal therapy help you?

Depending on your type of cancer and the stage of the disease, hormonal therapy can be used to :

- **Destroy** cancer cells
- **Stop** the cancer from spreading
- **Slow** the growth of cancer cells

How will you feel while on hormonal therapy?

Hormonal therapy changes the hormone levels in your body. Side effects that are caused by the decrease of hormones can arise at any time during your treatment.

Not everyone has side effects and each person's experience may be different. Side effects and their severity are not representative of hormonal therapy's effectiveness or lack thereof.

This document is about the most frequent side effects caused by your hormonal therapy.

Medication

Tamoxifen

Tablets to take by mouth

Administration

To be taken once daily

Take with or without food

On a continuous basis



A **blood test** will be done during treatment. Depending on the results and side effects of the previous treatment, the dose of the medication might be adjusted or the treatment might be interrupted if needed.

How to take your medication?

- Take your tamoxifen tablets as prescribed once daily at the same time every day. You may take your medication before or during your meal with a large glass of water or juice. If you have difficulty tolerating it, for example if it causes a stomach ache, take it while you eat.
- Tablets must be taken whole. Do not chew, split or crush the tablets.
- **If you forget a dose**, you may take it when you remember but do not double the next dose. However, try to take your pills at the same time every day and the same way (either with or without food).

Storing and handling your medicines



- Wash your hands immediately after handling your medication.
- Keep your medication at room temperature, out of the reach of children and pets as well as protected from light, heat or moisture. Do not keep medicines in the bathroom.
- Don't throw away unused medication at home. Bring it back to your pharmacy to be destroyed safely. You may dispose of the empty containers in your home garbage can.
- If the medication inadvertently comes in contact with the surrounding surface, wash and rub the surface with water and soap.
- Caregivers should wear disposable gloves if they prepare medication for you. You can find disposable gloves at your local community pharmacy.
- Keep your medications in their original container and do not mix them with other drugs.

How can this treatment affect your daily life?

Fatigue and alcohol



- You may experience **fatigue** during your treatments. This is usually temporary and may be related to different reasons (medication, stress, the disease). Maintain a good level of activity but rest when you feel the need to.
- **Alcohol** in small quantities is allowed and will not affect the efficacy of the treatment.

Sex life and birth control

- You can have an **active sexual** life during your treatments. However, a decrease in your sexual drive may occur during this period. This may also be influenced by different factors (fatigue, stress, etc.).
- It's safe to kiss, to touch, to hold hands, to sleep in the same bed and to cuddle.
- In **pre-menopausal female patients** hormonal therapy may cause the **menstrual cycle** to be irregular or stop completely during treatment. The menstrual cycle may restart or

return to normal after the end of treatment. The menstrual cycle may also stop permanently. However, a pregnancy remains possible and treatment administered during pregnancy may harm the embryo.

- **Birth control** is strongly recommended during treatments and up to 2 months after the end of treatment.
- Breast-feeding is not recommended during treatment.
- For **male patients**, the treatment may affect the sperm and it may be harmful to the embryo.
 - If you have sex with a woman of child-bearing age, a birth control method is strongly recommended during treatments.
 - Notify your doctor immediately if you had unprotected sex and your partner is pregnant.

Medicines to avoid



- Tamoxifen works by decreasing the quantity of **estrogen** in your blood. It is therefore important to avoid taking products containing hormones to treat menopausal symptoms like hot flashes, vaginal dryness, etc. Some natural remedies also contain ingredients that have hormone-like effects. If you are considering taking such products, consult your pharmacist who will evaluate if it is safe for you to use them.

Tips and precautions



- **Sit down to urinate and fold down the toilet lid**
Women as well as men should sit down to urinate and fold down the toilet lid before flushing in order to avoid splashing. Flush twice to make sure everything has been flushed away. Follow these precautions during your treatments (or according to instructions from your cancer center).
- **Bodily fluids**
During the treatment period, it's possible that a certain quantity of the medication is found in some bodily fluids or secretions that you produce, such as urine, stools, vomit, sperm and vaginal discharge. In order to protect the environment and those living with you, follow the instructions given by your cancer center about the right way to handle and dispose of the bodily fluids.



- **Over the counter medicines, natural health products and vaccines**
Consult your healthcare team:
 - if you intend to take any other medication (with or without a prescription) or natural health products.
 - if you need to receive a vaccine.This could decrease your treatment's efficacy or increase its side effects.
- **Always have on hand the complete list of your medications**
Be sure to always have on hand the complete list of your medications, dietary supplements, vitamins and other natural health products. Give it to your doctor and your pharmacist. It is important to make them aware of any change.

What are the side effects of your treatment?

This fact sheet aims to let you know the side effects most commonly seen following the administration of your treatment. Please note that when you take any medication, there is a possibility that it causes rare side effects and it is difficult to predict which patients will be affected.

ADVERSE EFFECTS

MANAGEMENT

Hot flashes

You may experience hot flashes. These effects vary between individuals and usually go away with time.

- Take your medication at bedtime.
- However, if the hot flashes disturb your sleep, take your medication in the morning. Do not forget to consult your pharmacist before taking natural remedies; they could decrease the efficacy of your treatment.
- If these symptoms persist over time or are bothering you, speak with your healthcare team that will recommend appropriate measures.

Skin rash

A skin rash (redness, pimples), usually mild, may occur during your treatment. This rash may be associated with itchiness.

- If this is bothering you, contact a member of your healthcare team who will recommend appropriate measures.

Vaginal dryness

You may experience itchiness or vaginal dryness.

- If this is bothering you, consult your pharmacist who could recommend some creams.

Nausea

Rarely, slight nausea may occur.

- Contact a member of your healthcare team if you have nausea that bothers you.

Muscle and bone pain

You may experience muscle and bone pain as well as cramps that may occur during your treatment.

- If you present with bone or muscle pain, speak with a member of your healthcare team who will recommend an appropriate pain reliever.

Headaches

You may experience headaches.

- If this happens and is bothering you, talk to a member of your healthcare team who will recommend a medication for pain.



ADVERSE EFFECTS

MANAGEMENT

Hair loss

Usually there is **no hair loss** with this treatment.

However, depending on the individual, thinning of the hair may occur.

However, don't worry; your hair will grow back after treatments have ended.

- Use gentle shampoo.
- In order to slow hair loss, avoid brushing hair vigorously.
- Avoid hair spray, dyes and perms.

RARE ADVERSE EFFECTS THAT CAN BE SEVERE OR SERIOUS

If the following side effects occur, stop your treatment and call your healthcare team as quickly as possible or go to the Emergency Room:

- Pain with or without warmth and redness on the calves or the legs accompanied by sudden difficulty breathing
- Weakness or numbness of the face, the arms or the legs, trouble speaking correctly or understanding what others are saying, blurred or double vision or dizziness and loss of balance

PHARMACIST: _____

PHONE: _____

FROM ____ H ____ TO ____ H ____ (MONDAY TO FRIDAY)

This fact sheet has been prepared by a sub-committee of the Comité national de l'évolution de la pratique des soins pharmaceutiques of the Programme québécois de cancérologie of the Ministry of Health and Social Services in consultation with the Comité de l'évolution de la pratique en oncologie of the Institut national d'excellence en santé et en services sociaux.

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